

## Follow directions completely:

*Before you read the article:*

① - Step 1 for marking text - Number your paragraphs. This is for easy reference. Write the number of each paragraph down the left hand side of the article like I've done here

*As you read the article:*

② - Step 2 for marking text - Circle any unknown words. Look for vocabulary that you don't know.

- Step 3 for marking text - Underline the major points. This will help you understand main idea and find the highlights as you read.

When you're finished reading the article, answer the discussion questions in complete sentences.



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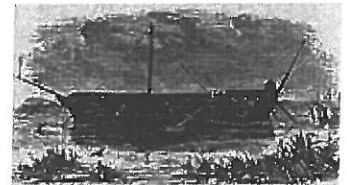
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## History: Tragedy: Prison Ships & General Slocum

### Prison Ships

More Americans died in British prison ships in New York Harbor than in all the battles of the Revolutionary War.

There were at least 16 of these floating prisons anchored in Wallabout Bay on the East River for most of the war, and they were sinkholes of filth, vermin, infectious disease and despair. The ships were uniformly wretched, but the most notorious was the Jersey.



The Prison Ship *Jersey*  
Brooklyn Historical Society

Following the Battle of Long Island in August, 1776, and the fall of New York City soon after, the British found thousands of prisoners on their hands, and the available prisons in New York filled up quickly. Then, as the British began seizing hundreds of seamen off privateers, they turned a series of aging vessels into maritime prison ships.



Sketch of Starving Men on the Jersey  
Charles Allen Munn Collection,  
Fordham University Library

There were more than a thousand men at a time packed onto the Jersey. They died with such regularity that when their British jailers opened the hatches in the morning, their first greeting to the men below was: "Rebels, turn out your dead!"

There were 4,435 battle deaths during the Revolutionary War, according to the Department of Defense. One historian estimated that there were between 7,000 and 8,000 prison ship deaths, but other sources claim even more. A letter-writer from Fishkill in 1783 claimed that on the Jersey alone, 11,644 died. Although that figure is unlikely for the one ship, it is reasonable for all the prison ships together, and is cited regularly.

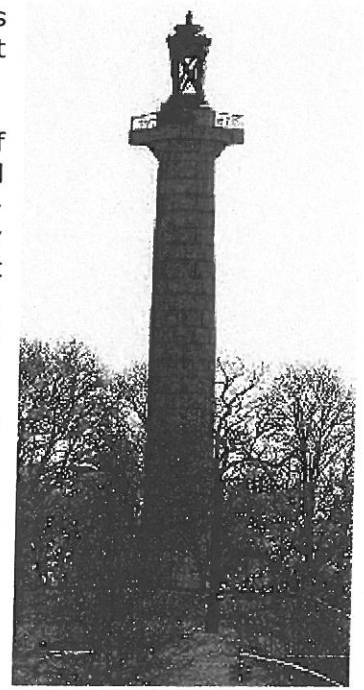
Built in 1735 as a 64-gun ship, the Jersey was converted to a prison ship in the winter of 1779-1780. Virtually stripped except for a flagstaff and a derrick for taking in supplies, the Jersey was floated, rudderless, in Wallabout Bay, about 100 yards offshore of what is now the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Its portholes were closed and supplanted by a series of small holes, 20 inches square, crossed by two bars of iron.

There were various ways to get off the prison ships. The British had a standing offer that any prisoner could be released immediately if he joined the British forces, and an unidentified number did so. Prisoners who carried money with them could buy their way off the ship. Others managed to escape. Also, prisoner exchanges were quite common, with officers exchanged for officers, seamen for seamen, soldiers for soldiers. But for vast numbers of prisoners, there were only two possibilities: death or the end of the war, whichever came first.

At war's end, survivors were released, and the prison ships abandoned. In later years, bleached bones of the dead were constantly exposed to the tides and weather along the Long Island shore. And well into the next century, low tide regularly exposed the rotting timbers of the Jersey, the ship they called Hell.

The memory of the those who died in the floating prisons on Wallabout Bay is forever enshrined at the Prison Ship Martyrs Monument in Brooklyn's Fort Greene Park.

It took a while to get there, however. It wasn't until 1808 that the bones of many of the prison ship dead were given a proper burial near the Navy Yard in Brooklyn by the Tammany Society of New York. In 1873 the bones were re-interred in Fort Greene Park. The current monument was erected in 1908 by the Society of Old Brooklynites. Now, the Brooklyn group is planning to erect an eternal flame -- actually, a stainless steel sculpture in the shape of a flame that would be gilded, like the flame of the Statue of Liberty -- atop the column.



Prison Ship Martyrs Monument

Discussion questions:

Use the back if you need more room.

Describe the conditions on a British prison ship (3-4 sentences):

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Explain how Rebel troops could get freed from a prison ship (3-4 sentences)

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